

ENVELOPE WITH MULTIPLE POCKETS

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0001] The present invention is directed to an expandable envelope having multiple, variously sized compartments to present the customer properly-sized compartments for receiving various photographic storage means, such as conventional film, disks, or memory modules for depositing the storage means and for returning the negatives to the customer.

[0002] Recently, many major technological breakthroughs in consumer electronics have really built around the same basic process: converting conventional analog information into digital information. The digital camera is an example of this shift. All digital cameras have a built-in computer and record images in an entirely electronic form.

[0003] Early generations of digital cameras had fixed storage inside the camera. You needed to connect the camera directly to a computer by cables to transfer the images. Although most of today's cameras are still capable of connection to a computer, they usually provide the consumer with some sort of removable storage device. There are a number of storage systems currently used in digital cameras, such as: SmartMedia Cards, which are small flash memory modules; CompactFlash, another form of a flash memory card, similar to but slightly larger than SmartMedia cards; Memory Stick, a proprietary form of flash memory used by Sony, or a disk, which are small built-in hard disks, or PCMCIA hard-disk cards, for image storage. Finally, some of digital cameras are using writeable CD and DVD drives to store images.

[0004] The present photographic-development envelopes for receiving and separate work pockets for returning film and negatives are generally unsuited for the new digital format. The compartment for the envelopes are too large for either the disk or flash memory modules. This is undesirable because during handling the disks and cards tend to float within the envelope, which may impair the stored images. For example, the disk surface may get scratched due to excessive movement within the envelope. This is especially true if the consumer includes more than one form of film,

i.e., when the consumer includes both a disk storage device and a film canister in the same compartment.

[0005] In addition to not being designed for memory modules and disks, another concern for the photographic industry is the numerous envelopes used in order to complete one process request. A “counter bag” is commonly used for holding the film or photographic negatives of a customer. These counter bags were typically envelopes or pockets having a space for customer-identification information and a tear-off strip with indicia that identifies the customer’s envelope. These envelopes are provided by the retail store and either a clerk or the customer completes the customer-identification section for processing.

[0006] The counter bag is then inserted in a separate envelope referred to as a “print pocket” or “work pocket.” The work pocket is designed to carry the counter bags with the film, negatives, memory stick, prints, or other from the retailer to the processing laboratory. The work pocket includes information such as the customer’s requested processes, size and number of prints, disk or other options. The work pocket further includes a pocket-identification number, a claim check, which includes the same pocket-identification number, the retail store information, and the customer information. The work pocket is forwarded to a photo-finishing laboratory. The work pocket accompanies the customer’s film or other work through the finishing process. Upon completion, the negatives, memory module or other storage means is placed in a negative pocket, which is inserted into a photo wallet along with the prints and/or disk. The photo wallet is placed back into the work pocket and returned to the retailer. The customer then picks up the work pocket with the other envelopes inserted therein. As is evident, this process requires numerous envelopes or pockets.

[0007] Even retailers that provide in-house photo processing may provide counter pockets of different sizes or shapes depending on whether the customer is depositing film, negatives, prints or memory modules. Upon completion of the processing, the retailer inserts the negatives, memory module or other storage means in a negative pocket, which is inserted into a photo wallet along with the prints and/or disk. The photo wallet is placed back into the original counter pocket and returned to the customer.

[0008] Consequently, it is desirable to have an envelope that is suitable for the photographic business and, in particular, a single envelope for receiving and returning photographic images stored on any of various storage means, the underlining negatives, and in the case of digital storage means, storage device itself to a customer in a single envelope.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0009] An envelope includes a front panel and a rear panel connected at the bottom thereof so as to form an enclosure. An expandable end wall is formed by extensions of the front and rear panels on either side thereof. The expandable end walls are formed by a double folded flap forming inner and outer portions joined to the back panel and a flap joined to the front panel which allow folding inward of the end wall relative to the remainder of the envelope. In particular, the end wall is formed by joining the outer portion of the rear wall flap to the front wall flap. The envelope thus defines a first pocket.

[0010] A liner is secured to the rear panel. The liner is secured by areas of adhesive and at the areas of nonadhesive define a second comparatively smaller pocket and a third larger pocket.

[0011] A hinged back pocket is joined to the rear panel at a line of weakness. The hinged back pocket is configured to hang on the exterior surface of the rear panel and the receptacle defines a fourth pocket.

[0012] The envelope further includes a cover panel which is attached to the front panel and which extends over the top of the envelope to enclose the small and large pockets from the top.

[0013] The envelope is especially useful for depositing, storing and transporting photographs, memory modules, storage disks and negatives.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0014] FIG. 1 is a perspective view of the envelope subsequent to construction of the envelope from the blank of FIG. 6 and showing the envelope with the closure flap thereof open.

[0015] FIG. 2 is a front elevational view of an envelope for use in accordance with the present invention with all parts of the envelope blank except the closure flap in a folded configuration subsequent to manufacture of the blank.

[0016] FIG. 3 is a side elevational view of the envelope shown in FIG. 2 with the closure flap in an open configuration thereof.

[0017] FIG. 4 is an enlarged and fragmentary cross sectional view of the envelope, taken along line 4--4 of FIG. 1.

[0018] FIG. 5 is an enlarged and fragmentary cross sectional view of the envelope, as shown in FIG. 1.

[0019] FIG. 6 is a front elevational view of an envelope blank of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0020] As required, detailed embodiments of the present invention are disclosed herein; however, it is to be understood that the disclosed embodiments are merely exemplary of the invention, which may be embodied in various forms. Therefore, specific structural and functional details disclosed herein are not to be interpreted as limiting, but merely as a basis for the claims and as a representative basis for teaching one skilled in the art to variously employ the present invention in virtually any appropriately detailed structure.

[0021] The reference numeral 1 generally designates an envelope in accordance with the present invention. A cut envelope blank 3 is illustrated in FIG. 6 from which the envelope 1 is manufactured. With reference to FIG. 6, the envelope blank 3 is constructed by well-known methods of cutting from a larger single piece of paper stock, web, or roll of paper, and various lines of weakness, which facilitate folding along the lines, are formed on the envelope blank 3 by conventional and well-known methods. It is to be understood by those skilled in the art that lines of weakness may be perforations, score lines or fold lines, or other lines that weaken the blank in certain locations to enable the folding or bending of a portion of the envelope.

[0022] With reference to FIG. 2 and as will be described in greater detail below, the envelope 1 is constructed to have a pocket 47 to enclose photographs, an

additional pocket 79 to hold film negatives, a third pocket to hold a storage disk 55, and a fourth pocket to hold any of various digital flash memory modules 53.

[0023] The envelope 1, as seen in FIGS. 2 and 3 includes a rear panel 10, a front panel 11, a closure or seal flap 12, and a negatives holder 13. The front panel and rear panel are connected near a lower end thereof as seen in FIG. 1, by a bottom strip 15. The bottom strip 15 is joined along each side thereof to the rear panel 10 and front panel 11 at lines of weakness 16 and 17 respectively. There is also a center line of weakness 18 in the bottom strip 15 that runs parallel to the lines of weakness 16 and 17. The strip 15 folds or bends at the lines 16, 17 and 18 to allow expansion or compression of the envelope 1, that is, greater spacing between or less spacing between the rear panel 10 and front panel 11, respectively. As shown in the Figures, lines of weakness 16, 17, and 18 preferably are fold lines.

[0024] The rear panel 10 and front panel 11 are generally rectangular in shape and are relatively parallel to one another when the envelope is completed such as is shown in FIG. 1. Preferably, the front panel is provided with an area for a photo-finisher to provide any commentary regarding the requested services or the quality of the print, or any other statements.

[0025] The closure flap 12 is attached to the upper side of the front panel 11. The closure flap includes a top section 21 and a front cover section 22. The top section 21 is connected to the front panel 11 at a line of weakness 24. The top section 21 and cover section 22 are likewise connected at a line of weakness 25. There is also a center line of weakness 26 in the top section 21 that runs parallel to the lines of weakness 24 and 25. The lines of weakness 24, 25 and 26 allow folding therealong so that the closure flap 12 may be folded from an open configuration thereof to a closed configuration along any of the lines of weakness. Lines of weakness 25 and 26 likewise allows folding of the top section 21 so as to be folded further relative to the cover section 22 to enable the closure flap to be moved into the closed configuration when the envelope is in an expanded mode, e.g., full of developed prints. As shown in the Figures, lines of weakness 24, 25, and 26 preferably are fold lines.

[0026] Cover section 22 preferably includes one or more areas 27 of a releasable adhesive on an inner surface of cover section 22. The adhesive areas 27 enable a consumer to seal the deposit envelope to insure that the contents are secure.

The outer surface of cover section 22 of the closure flap preferably is provided with customer identification blanks for the customer to write in when depositing the envelope with the retailer.

[0027] As shown in Fig. 6, extending longitudinally from closure flap 12 is a return receipt section 19 that is connected to the closure flap at a line of weakness 20. Line of weakness 20 is preferably perforated such that a consumer who is dropping off an item to be developed, can remove this section. Preferably, this section has a unique identification numeral printed thereon which matches an identification number printed on either the front panel or closure flap to match the person that delivered the item for processing.

[0028] Extending laterally outward from each side of the front panel 11 when the envelope is still in the blank 3 form, are a pair of side flaps 29 and 30 (Fig. 6). The side flap 29 is joined to the remainder of the front panel 11 at a line of weakness 31 and there is a second line of weakness 32 which is parallel to the line 31 that substantially separates the side flap 29 into a first or inner segment 33 and a second or outer segment 34 and facilitates folding therebetween. Lines of weakness 31 and 32 preferably are fold lines.

[0029] The side flap 30 is likewise joined along one side thereof to the front panel 11 at a line of weakness 35 and has a second line of weakness 36 parallel to the first line of weakness 35 and which separates the side flap 30 into a first or inner segment 37 and a second or outer segment 38. As with the other lines of weakness described herein the lines 35 and 36 allow and facilitate relative folding of adjacent elements separated by the lines of weakness. Lines of weakness 35 and 36 preferably are fold lines.

[0030] As shown in Fig. 6, the rear panel 10 has laterally extending side flaps 41 and 42. The side flap 41 is attached to the rear panel 10 at a line of weakness 43 and the side panel 42 is attached to the rear panel 10 at a line of weakness 44. Lines of weakness 41 and 42 preferably are fold lines.

[0031] As best can be seen in Fig. 5, the front panel side flap 41 is fixedly joined with the back panel side flap outer segment 34 so as to overlap therewith and to be positioned inside thereof relative to the envelope 1. The side flap 41 is secured to the segment 34 by an adhesive, such as glue, or the like. Likewise the flap 42 is

fixedly secured to the segment 38. In this manner the side flaps 29 and 41 form an expandable sidewall 45 and the flaps 30 and 42 form an expandable sidewall 46.

[0032] A first pocket 47 is thus formed between the rear panel 10, the front panel 11, the sidewalls 45 and 46 and the bottom strip 15. The first pocket 47 is generally completed by placing the closure flap 12 in the closed configuration thereof.

[0033] A multiple pocket-forming intermediate liner 51 is attached to the rear panel 10 and extends substantially between opposite sides of this panel and from the top edge of the rear panel 10 to line of weakness 16. The liner 51 defines on the rear panel of the envelope a first comparatively small compartment 53 and another comparatively large compartment 55. The liner 51, as can be seen in Fig. 6 and in an end view in FIG. 4, is constructed of a rectangular sheet of paper stock, stiff card or the like. An adhesive is used to secure the liner 51 to the rear panel. As shown in Fig. 6, the adhesive is applied in specific adhesive areas on the rear panel to form the second pocket 53 and third pocket 55. Specifically, second pocket 53 is formed by adhesive area 56 applied around an edge bottom and middle portion of rear panel 10. The second pocket is operably sized and configured to receive a digital memory module or similarly sized objects. The third pocket is formed by the middle portion of adhesive area 56 and a second adhesive area 57 positioned on the lower portion of the opposite side of rear panel 10. This area 56 only extends a portion of the height of rear panel 10. This configuration allows third pocket 55 to be operatively configured to receive a storage disk.

[0034] As used herein any directional connotations refer to the envelope as aligned in FIGS. 6, 7 and 8. That is, with the envelope 1 being generally upright and the rear panel 10 and front panel 11 being generally vertically aligned with the closure flap 12 at the upper end of the envelope. While these specific directional connotations are utilized herein to better describe the invention relative to the drawings, it is foreseen that the envelope 1 can assume a wide variety of alignments and is often used with the front panel 11 positioned downwardly. Consequently, directional connotations as used herein are for description purposes only and are not intended to be limiting upon the scope of the invention.

[0035] The rear panel 10 is formed with a pair of cutouts 65, 66 to facilitate the insertion of cards or disks in or the removal of cards or disks from the

second and third pockets, 53, 55. Particularly, a first cutout 65 is formed near the upper left-hand corner of the rear panel 10, as is seen in FIG. 1. This cutout 65 is preferably positioned immediately in front of the second pocket 53 to allow easier access to the contents of the second pocket 53. The second cutout 66 is preferably formed near the upper right-hand corner of the rear panel to allow easier access to the third pocket 55.

[0036] As shown in Fig. 6, hinged back pocket 13 extends longitudinally from rear panel 10 when the envelope is still in the blank 3 form. The hinged back pocket 13 comprises

[0037] a rear section 71 and a front cover section 72. The rear section 71 is connected to the rear panel 11 at a line of weakness 74. The rear section 71 and cover section 72 are likewise connected at a line of weakness 75. The line of weakness 75 allows folding therealong so that the front cover section 72 may be folded to face rear section 71. The rear panel 10 and front panel 11 are generally rectangular in shape and are relatively parallel to one another when the envelope is completed such as is shown in FIG. 1. The hinged back pocket 13 is preferable sized such that both the rear section 71 and the front cover section 72 are smaller in height than the front and rear panel, 10, 11, respectively.

[0038] Extending laterally outward from each side of the rear section 71 of the hinged back pocket 13 are a pair of side flaps 76 and 78 (Fig. 6). The side flap 76 is joined to the remainder of the rear section 71 at a line of weakness 80. Side flap 78 is likewise joined along one side thereof to the rear section 71 at a line of weakness 82. As with the other lines of weakness described herein the lines 80 and 82 allow and facilitate relative folding of adjacent elements separated by the lines of weakness.

[0039] As best can be seen in Fig. 5, the side flaps 76, 78 are fixedly joined with the rear surface of front cover section 72 so as to overlap therewith and to be positioned inside thereof relative to the envelope 1. The side flaps 76, 78 are secured to the front cover section 72 by an adhesive, such as glue, or the like. In this manner, the rear section 71, front cover section 72, and side flaps 76, 78 define the fourth pocket 79. The cover section 22 of the closure flap 12 overlaps the hinged back pocket 13 in the closed position.

[0040] As discussed with rear panel 11, rear section 71 of the hinged back pocket 13 is formed with cutouts 65, 66 to facilitate the insertion of cards or disks in or the removal of cards or disks from the second and third pockets, 53, 55. Particularly, first cutout 65 is formed near the upper left-hand corner of the rear section 71, as is seen in FIG. 1. This cutout 65 is preferably positioned immediately in front of the second pocket 53 to allow easier access to the contents of the second pocket 53. The second cutout 66 is preferably formed near the upper right-hand corner of the rear section 71 to allow easier access to the third pocket 55.

[0041] During use of the envelope 1, the envelope 1 is configured as in FIG. 1 and the photographs (shown in ghost lines), the disk (shown in ghost lines), the memory module (shown in ghost lines), the negatives, or any combination thereof are placed in the envelope 1. The closure flap 12 is closed and the customer identification information is completed by the customer or retailer. The return receipt section 19 is removed and the envelope 1 is then ready to be transferred by the retailer to a photo-finishing developer.

[0042] In this fashion, the envelope 1 of the present invention operates as a counter bag.

[0043] Upon receiving the prints, film, memory cards and/or compact disk, the photo-finishing developer processes the requests and inserts the prints in the first pocket 47, returns the flash memory module, if provided, in the second pocket 53, inserts the disk, if provided, in the third pocket 55, and places any negatives in the fourth pocket 79. The developer then reseals the adhesive areas 27 on the rear panel and returns the packet to the retailer, who, in turn, returns the envelope of the present invention to the customer. In this fashion, the envelope 1 of the present invention operates as a work bag.

[0044] It is to be understood that while certain forms of the present invention have been illustrated and described herein, it is not to be limited to the specific forms or arrangement of parts described and shown.